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TWO SERMONS,

FOR THE

FESTIVALS and FASTS

OF THE

CHURCH of ENGLAND.

By JOSEPH HOLDEN POTT, M.A.

Prebendary of *Lincoln*, and Archdeacon of *St. Albans*.

L O N D O N :

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TO THE
RIGHT REVEREND
B E I L B Y,
LORD BISHOP of LONDON.

MY LORD,

YOUR eminent station as a Ruler
of the Church, and your excellent example as a mem-
ber of it, render you, in a signal manner, the object
of attention to your Clergy: any attempt on their part
to promote the cause of Christianity, may, perhaps,
entitle

entitle them to assume the sanction of your Lordship's name, as an argument that their labours are directed to a good end: the Author of the ensuing discourses desires to introduce them to the world with that advantage; he is equally desirous, at the same time, to profess himself to be,

In all duty and respect,

Your LORDSHIP'S

Faithful Servant.

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S E R M O N,

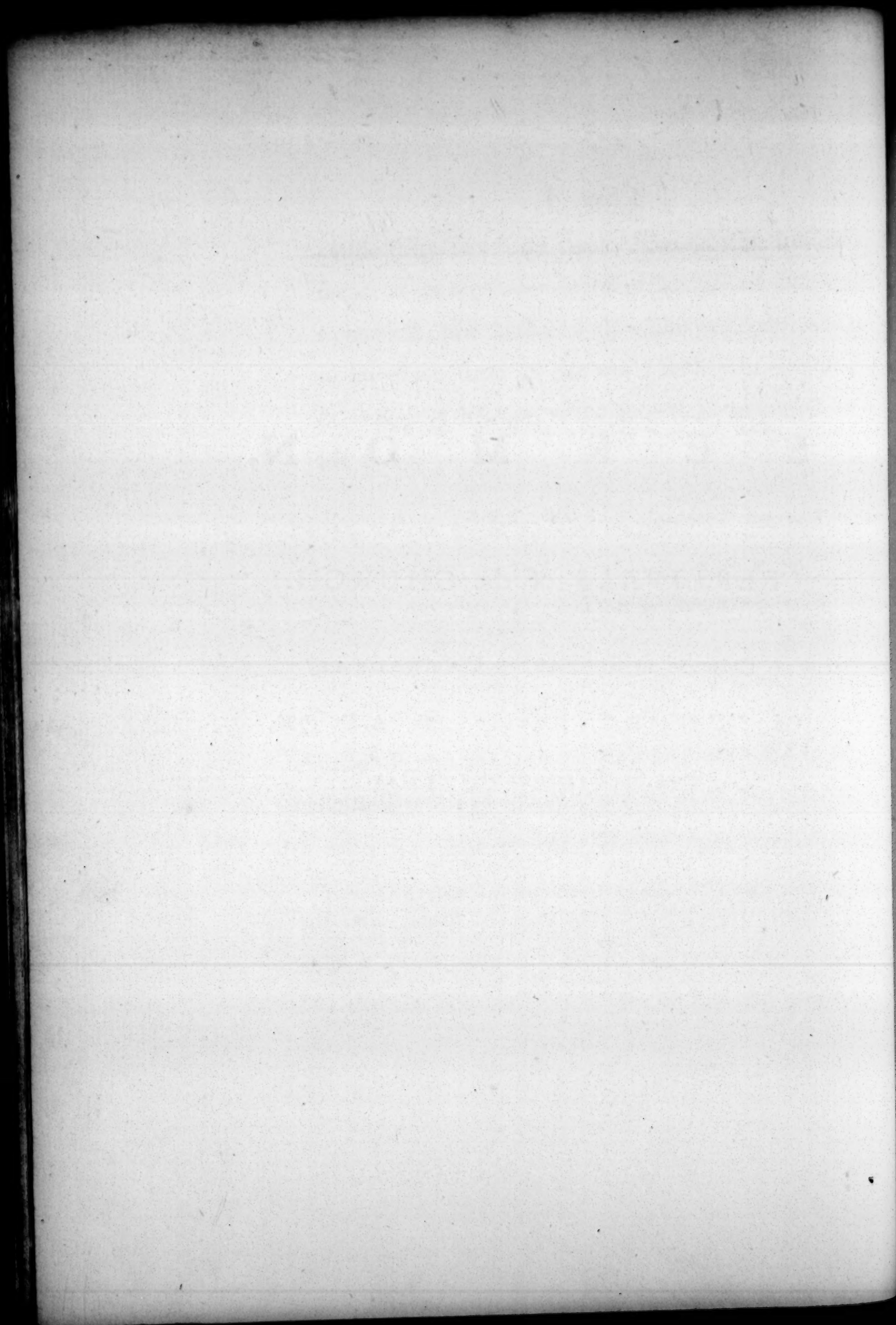
FOR THE

FESTIVALS of the CHURCH:

Preached at St. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL,

On SUNDAY, AUGUST 24th, A.D. 1788,

Being St. BARTHOLOMEW'S DAY.



II. PETER, Ch. i. v. 16.

*“ For we have not followed cunningly-devised fables,
“ when we made known unto you the power and coming
“ of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of
“ his majesty.”*

THE Scripture-History becomes the rule of doctrine, and the pattern of practice, chiefly by the well-attested narrative of important facts and actions.

When Moses gathered together the tribes, with the elders and officers of Israel, to give them a final admonition, and to set before them the motives and

the consequences of obedience, he stated to them the records of the days of old, as the ground of all the arguments and lessons which he delivered.*

When Joshua gave his farewell exhortation to the chosen people, and endeavoured to impress upon their minds a sense of duty and religion, he adopted the same mode, and recapitulated, distinctly and particularly, the transactions of past ages ; deducing his persuasions from the sacred annals, and memorable works of ancient time.†

When Samuel admonished the people, upon the confirmation of the kingdom to Saul, and upon the conclusion of that glorious theocracy which a stubborn generation had rejected, he pursued the same plan ; prefacing his discourse, which was afterwards confirmed by a miracle, with these words : “ Now, therefore, “ stand still, that I may reason with you before the
“ Lord,

* Deut. xxxii.

† Joshua, xxiv.

“ Lord, of all the righteous acts of the Lord, which
 “ he did to you, and to your fathers: and concluding
 it, after he had urged obedience, and encouraged
 repentance, upon the ground of that detail, with
 this admonition: “ Only fear the Lord, and serve
 “ him in truth; for consider how great things he
 “ hath done for you.”

In all the reasonings which the Almighty himself
 vouchsafed to hold with his people, by the mouths of
 his Prophets, the same facts are recited, and the same
 great motives set in view: “ Remember, says he, the
 “ former things of old, for I am God.”*

The doctrines and precepts of religion were thus
 enforced under the former Testament: the method,
 also, in the Gospel, seems, for the most part, to be
 the same.

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* Isaiah, xli. Isaiah, xlvi, v. 9. Jeremiah, ii. See the prophetic books throughout.

The Evangelists, who were to propagate religion, as well as to record its annals, accomplished both by furnishing a plain and simple narrative of each event and action, in the life of our Redeemer. To commemorate, and to convert, made one design with them, and were effected by one method.

When our Lord's Apostles preached, we find them following the same order.

The first preaching of St. Peter, after the descent of the Holy Spirit, was a plain assertion of incontestable facts, of which the Jews themselves had been witnesses, compared with the prophecies of David, and stated in their true import.* Again, at the gate of the temple, he delivers the same form of doctrine:† and when the angel of the Lord had released that holy Apostle from the prison, into which he had been cast for those words, and had said unto him, “ Go stand, and
“ speak

* Acts, ii, v. 22, &c.

† Acts, iii, v. 13, &c.

“ speak in the temple the words of this life,” we find him, in obedience to this command, rehearsing openly the same signal events.*

The defence and doctrine of St. Stephen, was a clear recital of the sacred records, recapitulated and brought down to their final completion in Christ Jesus.†

The preaching of St. Peter to Cornelius and his company, at the calling of the Gentiles, was a brief and compendious narrative of evangelical events.‡

St. Paul, in his preaching in the synagogue of Antioch, traverses the same field, and pursues the same order with St. Stephen.§ St. John urges the same instances of sacred history; and, without further arguments, builds the same persuasions upon them.||

From

* Acts, v, v. 30, &c.

† Acts, vii.

‡ Acts, x, v. 36.

§ Acts, xiii, v. 16, &c.

|| 1 John, iv, v. 9, &c.

From this agreement it is evident that such a mode of preaching was not casual.

The contentions and divisions with the Jews and others, introduced discursive arguments: the illustration of some great events, and their comparison with the records and testimonies of the former covenant, occasioned some discussions, and established many points of doctrine, very needful for our knowledge and improvement: but still the simple pattern of instruction was the history of Christ; the series of events that ushered in the long-expected Saviour; the circumstances and detail of what he taught, and did, and suffered.

The apostolical Epistles, setting apart the answers and discussions of questions brought in by opposers, and the rules relating to the government and discipline of the Church, enumerate the same facts, and urge the same examples; delivering them as the form of faith,
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and the standard of obedience. Thus the Apostle writes to the Corinthians: " I declare unto you the
 " Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye
 " have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also
 " ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached
 " unto you, unless ye have believed in vain: for I
 " delivered unto you first of all that which I received;
 " how that Christ died for our sins, according to the
 " Scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he
 " rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures;
 " and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve;
 " after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren
 " at once, of whom the greater part remain
 " unto this present, but some are fallen asleep; after
 " that he was seen of James; then of all the Apostles;
 " and last of all, he was seen of me also." The main
 practice of Christianity inculcated by St. Paul, is
 grounded chiefly upon a conformity to Christ, and
 resolves into that great exemplar: he constantly reminds
 us that we neither consider properly, nor believe

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aright,

aright, the various portions of his history, unless it be drawn by us into an example ; since each of the great transactions in the work of our redemption, contributes to form the body of instruction, and each is held out for us to copy after.

Having instanced these particulars, we shall find with what propriety the same plan and order was adopted in the Catholic Creeds of the Church. St. Paul himself seems to have set the pattern ; and in the charge he gave to Timothy, setting forth a formulary as the sum of what he was to teach, he delivers an epitome of Gospel-History : “ Great is the mystery of
“ godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified
“ in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the
“ Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up
“ into glory.” And thus there was a model given for succeeding Creeds : accordingly a plain assertion of the three Persons in the Godhead, and a brief recital of the great events of the Gospel, compose nearly the whole

whole substance of the earliest Creeds. It was the folly and perverseness of gain-sayers, which rendered explanations and deductions necessary in the Creeds which followed.

A faithful recollection and a diligent endeavour, a pious mindfulness of exemplary facts and actions, and a dutiful conformity of conduct to those authentic testimonies, constitute the truest features of the Christian life: the mind, without difficulty, builds profitable lessons on those well-attested records: a careful remembrance of the fact, and a zealous imitation of the action, form the surest measures of religion. The weakness of our apprehensions, and the vanity of our affections, are but too apt to mislead us, when we wander from these sources of instruction. In full agreement with this scheme of faith and duty, appear the piety and wisdom of the blessed Virgin, recorded in St. Luke: to lay up the words of God in the heart, to attend their issue with a perfect resignation,

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to treasure up the passages of our Redeemer's holy life, described the measure of her faith: to ponder these things, to meditate upon them, and to yield intire obedience to the will of God, composed the sum of her obedience. The same instructive and sufficient example, exhibited in the life of Christ, is the compendium of the faith which we profess; and the same compliance with the divine will made known in the sacred records, and erected on the testimonies of astonishing and signal events, forms the substance of our duty. The teaching and the counsels of our Lord, serve to illustrate such events. In the Parables we have the same method of conveying instruction, by narrative: they are illustrations of precepts, by character and actions; and as the instances of benevolence which accompanied the life of our Redeemer, were declared by the Evangelists to have been multiplied beyond the bounds of any volume,—what might be wanting, is supplied by instructive discourses, by
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the purest lessons, and by easy inferences, which illustrate and connect what is related.

If we trace, with attention, the order of the wonderful events which are thus recorded and illustrated, the view will at all times furnish abundant matter for our heedful contemplation ; and will preserve the minds of those who are willing to receive the truth, and ready to obey it, from barren and unprofitable questions. The records of the Scripture, in their simplest sense and application, will supply the rules of faith and practice. When we read the several circumstances of the incarnation of our blessed Lord, related by the holy Evangelists, we require no long deductions to assure us that he is God of God ; when, in the course of the same narrative, he takes the style of the Almighty, who revealed his name to Moses, and bad him say, “ I am
“ hath sent me ;” denoting, by that name, his necessary existence from eternity.—When Christ assumes to himself the same words and description, and says,

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“ before

“ before Abraham was, I am,” the inference from this plain comparison is evident and undeniable :—and as whoever calls to mind the many miracles he did in his own name, will be ready, with St. Thomas, to exclaim, “ My Lord, and my God ;” and, with St. Stephen, to address his prayer to him ;—so, whoever will peruse the sad recital of the sufferings of Jesus, will acknowledge him as very man, acquainted with grief, and subject to infirmity and sorrow.

Again, when we read, in the narrative of the Evangelist, of the Holy Ghost descending, in a bodily appearance, on the Son, whilst the Father proclaims his dignity from heaven, we know, demonstrably, that the Eternal Spirit is neither a quality nor a power, but distinct from the Father, who speaks at the same time, and distinct from the Son, who is ascending from the waters of baptism. In these great articles of faith, therefore, the plain narration of the sacred Penmen becomes a sufficient and infallible guide to us. In points of practice,

practice, and in the necessary rules of well-doing, the records of our Saviour's faultless conduct, the many instances of lowliness, of mildness, and beneficence, which shone therein so plenteously, the testimonies of that dutiful submission to fulfil all righteousness, which distinguished the spotless life of our Redeemer, exhibit a full pattern for our imitation. A steadfast, uniform, and zealous application of that example in our own deportment, will constitute the substance of a godly life, in as much as to resemble the Son, is to conform to the will of the Father, the thing for which we pray daily; and to follow the same pattern, is to approach, in due degrees, to the divine perfections, which is the principal obligation of our nature.

In conformity to this rule of faith and practice, and to this method of propagating and maintaining it, appear the salutary institutions of the Church, which allow to each memorable point of this important history, a celebration, and a season vindicated
from

from the common lapse of ordinary days, and appropriated to express observance.

The expedience and utility of these consecrated times, are eminently visible: they fix each particular of the sacred story with a lively energy upon the mind; they recall the circumstances of them with especial force; they hallow the regular reverfions and periods of the year to distinguished uses of religion. The Almighty, of old time, in appointing his sabbaths, made choice of those seasons which, in their return, reflected what had been before transacted. The whole consent and usage of mankind have acquiesced in such commemorations, by which the deeds of former ages are rehearsed, the annals of antiquity preserved, and their influence renewed.

To the life of our Redeemer, the perfect pattern of goodness, the lives and actions of his most distinguished and faithful servants succeed, in a lower order of example.

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The first is the sole image of perfection to us, the standard of a faultless piety, and of a meritorious and entire obedience; but in many instances the secondary examples are also conspicuous among the records given for our improvement; they are recommended to the faithful in all ages, with the endearments and the cogency of fellowship. Although Christ has, in his goodness, allowed, to such as fulfil his will, the titles of brethren, and of the nearest kindred to himself, yet he alone had the elder brother's portion—the unction without measure: in the members there has existed a common condition, a common union of interests, a common need deriving succour from the same source. The example of a fellow-soldier, though less eminent in value and authority than that of the chief captain and first leader, is greatly animating, is near at hand to us, even in our own rank, and by our side. The constancy of such holy persons, under sufferings of all kinds, became as loud a testimony of the truth, as their teaching and their sanctity. The Instruments of malice

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who brought so many of them to cruel trials, were but ministers to their glory: they presented to them the cup of their divine Master, and united those to him, in the fellowship of sufferings, who had before lived with him and followed him in the fellowship of love: they placed crowns upon their brows, which were to glisten with eternal brightness, when their own polluted diadems should fall into the dust—should be torn from their heads, by the hands of private treachery, or public tumult, or mix an ineffectual splendor with the horrors of some dire disease. Accordingly the pious celebration of the memories of Christ's faithful soldiers, constituted a part of the earliest services among Christians. Their tombs were made the places of assembly—not as shrines for adoration—not as altars where another intercessor than the son of God might be invoked, or other merits pleaded than those of one sufficient Saviour—but as places made dear by the remains of some sufferer in the cause of Christ, or some zealous promoter of his holy religion, the memory
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of whose virtues blossomed like the rod of Aaron, though long since cut off from earthly nourishment. The sepulchres of the good and pious spake as forcibly to the minds of men, as their former eloquence; and, like the grave of Elisha, which restored life to the departed, animated many in the cause of truth: the holy brethren did not adorn them with the false zeal with which the hypocrites among the Jews did the tombs of the Prophets, whom they had before persecuted and stoned: with a decent veneration they bare their bodies to the grave, as that of St. Stephen was carried forth, with lamentation and attendance, and they celebrated their memories, without giving testimony against themselves.

If the use of external objects or representations occasioned a perversion in the practices of men, yet the pious duty, and the spiritual benefit, are not to be excluded. If the brazen serpent which Moses deposited in the house of God, as a memorial and a token of
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the divine mercy, became an object of superstition, and was therefore broken by the pious hands of Hezekiah, still the memory of that event, which had been attested by it, did not become less dear ; nor did the recollection of it cease to oblige the consciences, or to bind upon the hearts of men: in like manner, if the tomb and the relick were abused by a superstitious regard which provoked the wholesome violence of reformation, still the spiritual part, the lively recollection, the call to imitate the example of illustrious piety, and to celebrate the memories of those in whom it shone forth so conspicuously, is not done away. We are not to deny a place in our remembrance and affections to those servants of the Lord whose high commission and abundant graces, whose constant services and faithful labours, have established for them an eminent distinction in the records of the Church. As the memorials of the miracles in Egypt, and in the wilderness, although not laid up with God's commandments, possessed a place beside the ark ; in like manner the names and examples

examples of the Saints are now deposited where piety may contemplate them with safety, and may praise God for his former goodness, praying to be continued in that communion which comprehends, according to their several conditions, the departed and the living, and in which the will of God is done on earth, as it is in heaven.

In fine, let us endeavour to shut out from the sober paths of a sound faith, and practical religion, the wantonness and latitude of speculative minds, the barren pride of notional zeal, and the dubious and illusive tests of mere sensation, which rather tend to feed the fancy than to regulate the conscience, or compose the substance of an holy life, and reasonable service. Let us trace the solid grounds of a right belief, and dutiful deportment, in the faithful narrative of those events, and by the steady light of those examples, which leave little to imagination, in which the native splendour of divine truth, and the salutary rules of righteousness, are

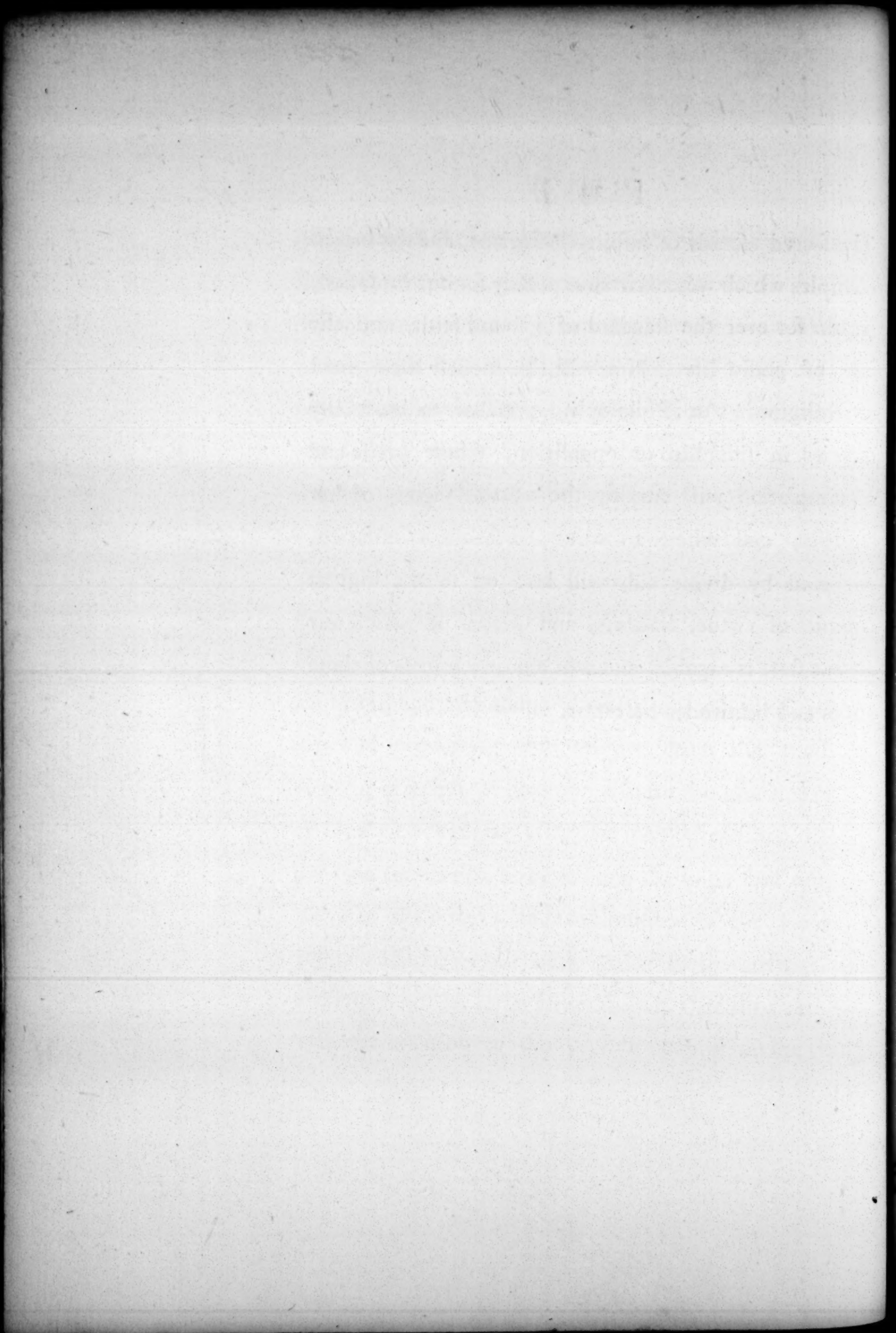
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demonstrated for our direction. Nor will such wise and humble resolutions at all confine the course of prudent disquisitions, where opinions shall be made to minister to godliness, but shall not be suffered to become the substitutes for well-doing. The useful aids of learning and of well-directed studies, the collateral proofs and evidences of religion, the just defences of it from its own excellence, the right conclusions from all solid arguments and persuasions, are highly beneficial and expedient, are eminently applicable to a dispensation the most reasonable, the most perfective of the human mind and understanding: these helpful means of defending and promoting true religion form the track of science, whose steps may run around the glorious circle of God's unchanging laws and holy revelations, whose prudent search may serve to trace the order and proportions of the works and testimonies of the Lord, to refine and elevate our zeal, and to invigorate our convictions: but let it be remembered, that they can furnish no addition to the perfect body of divine truth.

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The sacred records of inspired historians, and the bright examples which were written expressly for our imitation, remain for ever the standard of a sound faith, and the rule of godly life. Nor will the modest hand-maid of Religion, true Philosophy, presume to erect any theories in rivalry or opposition, where praise and contemplation will employ the utmost vigour of her faculties, and where a dutiful and studious imitation, prospered by divine aid, will lead on to the highest summits of virtue, holiness, and peace, of which our present state is capable, and will ensure a fulness of those graces and beatitudes hereafter.



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S E R M O N,

P R E A C H E D O N

A S H - W E D N E S D A Y,

A. D. 1789,

At the Parish Church of ST. MAGNUS, *London-Bridge.*

F. R. M. O. N.

A. H. W. T. H. E. R. A. T.

W. T. H. E. R. A. T. O. N. O. F. T. H. E. C. H. U. R. C. H.

MATTHEW, XVI. 24.

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself.

NO period of a life which is appointed for probation, can admit of sloth. They to whom an excellent reward is offered, must be willing to contend awhile: but when a special diligence is exacted, when the watch is doubled at the gates of the Church; to be found deficient in such times of trial, will denote a disaffected spirit, and a weak attachment to the main interests of religion.

Before we proceed to set forth the utility and expedience of those rules of discipline which the Gospel recommends in general terms, and for the exercise of which

which the Church appoints the stated seasons, it may be necessary to remove some prejudices which have obtained among us, to the detriment of piety and truth.

The great errors which took place concerning those exercises which were so much practised in the first ages of Christianity, were briefly these; the notion of a meritorious quality in any act of mortification; the vain conceit that salvation might be earned by such severities; the fond opinion that a proper satisfaction for sins committed, could be wrought by self-revenge; the doctrines of self-flattery, which taught men to place pre-eminence in the practice of what is necessary only by infirmity and imperfection, or at best auxiliary in the course of service. Of the same kind were the false persuasions which led men to imagine that they could exceed the line of duty, and establish a credit on their side by such performances. In all these instances of misconception, or perversion, arising from ill-guided zeal, or introduced by artful substitution, the means were put for the end;—the
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aids of discipline, for the substance of religion. The true doctrine of self-denial is not in the smallest degree affected by these errors. The precepts of Christ and his Apostles, and the rules and ordinances of the Church, stand entirely clear of these abuses. Having, therefore, stated the mistakes which have prevailed concerning the nature and design of godly discipline, let us pursue our estimate of its real obligation and utility. The precept is distinct and unequivocal, and is delivered by our Lord in person: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself." The primary sense of the words might refer chiefly to the sacrifices which Christians were called upon to make in profession of the faith, in times of persecution. It is my purpose to treat of self-denial in its general import, as it is calculated to suppress the growth of evil inclinations, and to promote the love of God: it is to that application of the precept which the Apostle appears to have made, when he says, "I keep my body in subjection," that I mean to lead your attention.

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To deny the works and wages of sin, and to serve God, is the plain and indispensable rule of duty: but without some sacrifices, in which even innocent and lawful things may be involved, it is not always easy, nor perhaps possible, to discharge the debt of service and obedience which is required of us. The Apostle's maxim therefore takes place, "all things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient." We are bound by strong and clear injunctions to be temperate in the use of present things; to avoid all solicitude, and all delicacy, in such matters; to check a blind attachment to them, and to discourage all anxiety for their increase. These appear to be the necessary measures of the rule of duty: but that these general limits may be truly observed, the right construction of what is undue and inordinate is not left to the decision of our biased judgements: the methods of maintaining due forbearance are expressed in many places, by precepts which instruct us, that in order to decline all evil actions, we must retrench their opportunities: we are taught, after
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resolving to refrain from evil, to endeavour to cut off its occasions. The treachery of present things, and the frailty of our nature, render a far stricter limitation necessary than our inclinations might point out, or than our choice might decree. The interests of faith may demand the sacrifice of many blandishments of sense. To refrain from sin, we must reject forbidden things *entirely*; to avoid danger, we must *often* decline those which are permitted. To fulfill the claims of duty, we must adopt the measures of prudence: in the performance of our services there is also a scale of excellence, and to excel we must use the arts of improvement.

By the mode in which the doctrines of self-denial are entertained, they should seem to be the peculiar yoke of religious duties: they rank, indeed, among the special lessons of the Gospel, which is the only dispensation that adapts instruction to the needs of its disciples, whilst it holds out a perfect rule of virtue. The law
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of conscience, and the law of Moses, were sufficient to reprove the sinner : the commission of evil brings with it its own witnesses, and its own plagues : few arguments are necessary to demonstrate the hatefulness of sin, the guilt of disobedience, and the dreadful consequences of iniquity : but to persuade men to look for pleasures in another scene of existence, in preference to present allurements ; to expose the insignificance of temporal enjoyments and possessions, when compared with future glories ; to show the danger of them when they fill the mind, and engross the heart ; and, in conformity to these demonstrations, to induce men not to settle their affections upon them ; or, in many instances, and under many circumstances, to renounce them ; required the strong persuasions of Divine Revelation. But a very slight consideration will serve to satisfy us, that the usual objects of pursuit among men, whether glory, benefit, or pleasure,—whether noble emulations, prudent cares, or vicious passions prompt
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their efforts, involve some severe conditions. Without self-government, and self-denial, nothing excellent can be attained, no virtue can be prosecuted, no useful art acquired, no science mastered, no accomplishment made perfect. Without forbearance of many kinds, man would become, by turns, a base follower of sensual appetites, a tyrant in the exercise of power, a mercenary in the mutual services of society, an invader of all order, and a slave to every gust of passion : Philosophy could teach this of old ; and without inculcating humility, and without the motives of faith, which are the grounds of Christian self-denial, could induce men to abhor the violence and tumult of unrestrained desires, and to despise a life of indolence and pleasure. If such persons could suffer, yet without self-abasement, and choose poverty, yet without poverty of spirit ; if they could curb the law of appetite, without those powerful inducements which are now provided to confirm the rule of reason ; if they could cultivate, by

stern and severe methods, a probity which terminated in its relation to the common rights and censures of mankind, or which expired within the breast that harboured it, in self-applause; shall the Christian scholar find difficulties in his lesson, with a meek, patient, and suffering Redeemer for his teacher, and with a deathless palm for his reward? Probation has, at all times, been the test of virtue, and difficulty the indispensable condition of victory and favour: there is nothing therefore strange in this doctrine, nothing inconsistent with the ordinary practice of mankind, or with the common fate of human attainments.

Let us now proceed to consider the true grounds of Christian self-denial, and to state distinctly the rightful measures of it as it must be reduced to practice: we may do this with a special regard to those exercises of restraint and abstinence which are more particularly enjoined at this season.

Christian

Christian self-denial rests upon two pillars—Humility and Faith: it grounds its principles upon an estimate of human weakness and corruption, and it leans upon the promises of God: it balances present things with future, and constantly prefers the latter where a competition happens. When men had so far departed from a right knowledge of themselves, that pride could cleave to sorrow and infirmity, the Church of Christ became the only school of humble manners. The examples of abasement meet us at the threshold: the mean repute of Bethlehem, and the circumstances which accompanied the birth of the Messiah, place humility in the first approaches to the Gospel; it salutes us at our entrance, and must abide with us in all our course. The present state of man presents a picture which cannot be contemplated with exultation or complacency. Whoever will consider that mixture of infirmity and imperfection which appears in the accounts of every man, however honourable in his generation, or high in comparative desert—whoever will regard that bondage

dage to necessities of various sorts, which so often counteract the best designs, will find ample admonitions to suppress the fallies of presumption: he will perceive sufficient arguments to convince him that we are not yet conquerors, nor established in quiet possession of the crown of life, but subject to temptations, and prone to failings and forgetfulness. A contemplation of this nature cannot fail to suggest to us the Apostle's exhortation, "Be not high-minded, but fear." A diffidence of ourselves forms the surest principle of salutary fear; and the arts of timely caution, self-denial, diligent correction of faults yet recent, habitual restrictions and abatements, are the best results of such well-founded apprehension.

Faith, which has been mentioned also as one ground of self-denial, by putting us under the conduct of future hopes and fears, encourages us to resist the influence of things present, and calls in the help of self-denial to rule them with a strong hand. The right use, and the true

true nature of this world, is taught by faith; and the first document in that estimate destroys at once a great proportion of the fallacies of life, by stating our condition under the covenant of Christ to be a pilgrimage, in which we have no continuing city, but “ profess to seek a country.” This state and condition was exhibited in the lives and manners of the Patriarchs, who contented themselves with mansions and possessions as transitory as their own state; coveting no more in this world than a tent for their abode, a valley for their flock, and a tomb for their remains: much more will faith remind the Christian traveller not to prefer the pilgrimage to the country which is sought; not to turn the succours and refreshments of the way into obstacles and impediments; not to live in such habits of improvidence, as if he were already in his own land, and had nothing of the toils and dangers of a journey to make him heedful and considerate. To invigorate these lessons, and to apply them, will require the aids of self-denial. From the grounds of self-

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denial, we may pass on to the method of its operation. We have abundant testimony that a spirit of indulgence, even in lawful things, tends perpetually to more dangerous advances : the sensual appetites have naturally no limits but what they receive from reason, and the law of the mind ; neither can ordinary gratifications be admitted to form the main end of life ; nor should they be suffered to gain such ascendancy in our affections, as to make us liable to forget their true nature, and intrinsic value ; accordingly a decided preference must be given to what is of a kind superior to common calls, and common appetites, or the best faculties and the noblest properties of man will decline : self-denial facilitates that preference, and prevents that declension. It is evident that things innocent in their own nature, frequently become hurtful by continuance and repetition ; and grow imperceptibly, from lawful measures, to excesses. Our Lord reminds us of temptations, and points out vigilance and prayer as necessary preventives. The force of habit, which attaches us so insensibly to

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trivial things, can only be hindered from enlarging its influence by some resolute and seasonable enfringement of its power, and by such overt acts of self-denial as may prove, from time to time, our readiness to renounce inferior objects, and our contempt of them in comparison of better interests. It is easy to perceive the danger and the evil consequences of unremitted care for present objects: the human mind, though large and comprehensive in its scope, is limited in the application of its faculties; it cannot embrace many things with the same attention: that pursuit which engages our most frequent wishes and endeavours, will give a bias to the heart, which will indispose it for all other things: thus pleasure to the ambitious, riches to the inquisitive, fame to the luxurious, pomp and splendor to the avaricious, prove insipid. If the thirst of glory, or the love of gain, or a voluptuous appetite—if things honest or dishonest bear the chief rule in our hearts, in vain will other interests solicit our attention; they may be more important, but they are less familiar; they may be more necessary,

necessary, but they are less beloved. From these obvious reasons it is evident how justly our Redeemer cautions his disciples not to suffer common concerns, or common allurements, to bear sway in their affections; declaring, in a peremptory manner, that we cannot serve two masters; and grounding many rules of self-denial upon that position: it is for these causes that we are enjoined to cut off the occasion of offence, though it may chance to be as dear to us as a right-hand. To these reflections we may add, that those acts of self-denial which indicate an humbled spirit, are most proper to offenders, and have ever been so esteemed and appointed in the church of God, in all ages, and under all dispensations: the refusing ordinary gratifications for a while, signifies, in a lively manner, a becoming sense that we have been unworthy of them; it sets forth a concern for our frequent misuse of them; and encourages a better apprehension of the value of them for the future: we learn the worth of many blessings by separation from them for a time. The acts and exercises of self-denial testify
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also a readiness to revenge our past transgressions as far as we are able, not with any notion of a valuable recompense, but that God, who shall perceive us to be willing to punish ourselves, may remit many just punishments of our offences, as the Apostle argues with the Corinthians.

From what has been advanced, it will, I trust, appear evident that self-denial is very needful and expedient to discourage the growth of vice, and no less conducive to the progress and increase of piety and good affections : that it is calculated to counteract the first motions and prime overtures of sin ; to subdue the body, which, as the partner and occasion of so many trespasses, is thus also significantly punished ; that it becomes a just expression of a state of sorrow for past offences, which is the first part of repentance ; and that it tends to secure a future amendment, which is the last and best part of repentance ; that it is a powerful mean to a good end ;

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that it is not, however, the end itself, and therefore must not be suffered to terminate in its own endeavour: it must furnish remedies and incentives; it must extend its influences and regards to the past and to the future, as a powerful enemy to all evil acts or inclinations, and as an effectual instrument of holiness. Still let us remember, that restraint and self-denial, however proper and expedient to us, and enjoined upon the clearest and most sacred testimonies, are but accessaries in the work of true religion, whose service is perfect freedom, whose whole influence tends to render them less necessary. The want of these distinctions has driven men into opposite extremes: some, by confounding that which is both necessary and useful in its due degree, and sanctioned by the word of God, with the essential rule of Christianity, fall into superstitions; others, who give, perhaps, a just statement of the rule of Christianity, but decline a discipline as wholly foreign to it, which is grounded on the lessons of the Gospel, and adapted to our needs,

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condemn that as superstitious which is requisite and helpful: the former practise Christianity with a pain and infelicity which must by no means be charged upon that holy law; the latter, it is to be feared, will scarcely learn to practise Christianity with such integrity as that holy law requires. Without doubt they who will not deny themselves at all in lawful things, that they may be secured against an undue regard for them, will scarcely attain to those eminent degrees of Christian virtue, wherein the love of God continually lessens every inclination for the pleasures and possessions of this life; in which consists that true contempt of the world, so signally manifested in the persons of many of the early converts to Christianity.

It may be useful to suggest some remarks concerning the seasons which are appropriated more especially for such exercises, and to add some necessary rules of prudence for the practice of them.

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The very terms of such measures of self-denial as are more especially enjoined at these seasons, the very condition of abstinence from accustomed comforts and indulgence, with whatever acts of forbearance and humiliation may best suit our circumstances or abilities, confine these exercises to certain portions of our lives : since, therefore, from our nature, which we are not to destroy, but to rectify, they can only be observed at intervals ; since, also, what is left indefinite in our concerns, is seldom done at all ;—from these reasons it is plainly consequent, that such times of abstinence and sorrow may well be ordered by the Church, in its wisdom, for providing things fitting and salutary. When we consider how unapt we are to execute any purpose, unless a time shall be appointed, and a proper season allotted for its accomplishment ;—when we reflect how easily procrastination counteracts our best designs, and how much indifference in choice inclines us to overlook our most incumbent duties ;—when we call to mind
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that common occupations and pursuits present an unremitted invitation, and are only to be superseded by a positive and clear injunction—we shall find the necessity and expedience of such institutions.

The present season of humiliation was anciently* made use of for putting scandalous offenders to an open penance, and for an earnest suit to God in their behalf: it was a time when the whole Christian Church was humbled, as one man, before the Lord, to supplicate a pardon for offences, with fasting, alms, and resolutions of amendment: if general defections baffle and obstruct the former discipline, the latter surely is more necessary; for if disorders have outgrown their remedies, or have multiplied so much as to exceed the comprehension of a just authority, the tokens of an humble fear and sorrow are more fitting, more significant, more becoming,

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* Concerning the antiquity of the Lent Fast, see Hooper on Lent, and Bishop Patrick's most useful little Treatise on Repentance and the Lent Fast.

on the part of all. It has been a common artifice to undervalue outward acts and expressions of religion : if we rest in them, they are indeed unprofitable ; but to deny their obligation and utility, is to subvert religion in its natural functions, and to set at nought both reason and experience. If David could give a pattern of holy joy to his household, by his gestures and his minstrelsey, when the ark of God was brought into Jerusalem ; and if the trumpet of the Levites could excite the courage of the warriors of Israel ; no less did the silence and the sackcloth of the mourner, the rent apparel and neglected dress, the baldness and dejection of the penitent, invite the sympathy of the Servant of God in old times. The public tokens, and the passionate display of Ezra's grief, brought a whole people to repentance and confession. Where is the reason for condemning any outward act, which is at once significant of good desires or resolutions, and helpful to increase them ? It rests for the confederate to ponder
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whether the neglect of our appointed times of prayer and abstinence, through the year, does not contribute, above measure, to the growth of vice in morals, and of ignorance, indifference, and inconsistency, in all the offices of Christian life; whether this manifest departure from the prime zeal of Christianity does not tend to withdraw the customary current of our thoughts and actions from the channels of religion, and by plain consequence to enslave us to the dominion of things present.

It remains to speak something concerning the rules of prudence and discretion in the use and application of such exercises of self-denial as are more especially enjoined at this time. To make what should be an aid to virtue, a breach of charity toward ourselves or others, would be evidently an error and a snare. We are not now confined to any single act of contrition or abasement: very many are set before us, which age and sickness

sickness on the one hand, avocations and necessities on the other, may vary in the instances. It is not a scruple that is intended, but a benefit. They who are impeded in the use of one mean, may apply another: all may unite in decent sorrow; in retirement from amusements; in wholesome resolutions; in a limitation of ordinary pleasures and societies; in such a conduct as is suited to a time of public sorrow, and public penance; and in such deportment as may be calculated to attach a share in the common benefits which may ensue: all may unite in such exercises of punctual prayer, and true repentance, as may tend to keep alive a public spirit of religion, to put by public judgements, and to encourage public blessings. Whatever be the special measures of abstinence and self-affliction, of prayer and assembly, of devotion and confession, of self-examination or correction, which are eminently proper to this Season, the general expedience of self-denial is not to be forgotten. Where a scrupulous exactness at

one time, is followed by a vain licentiousness at others, the folly is reciprocally heightened. Evil, with the dispositions to it, must be constantly restrained by the common arts of prudence, and not infrequently by severer recollections. They furnish a discouraging, false, and injurious picture of human life, who are not contented with exposing its vanities and unhappiness, but who represent its best enjoyments as engines of destruction: it is not, however, to be dissembled, that the good things of this life have the seeds of treachery within them, and therefore must be cautiously and wisely regulated in their application. Experience shews that snares are frequent in our paths, and surprises incident to our maturest resolutions. Rebellious sense, and native weakness, make denials often necessary. Joshua, though the Lord fought on his side, did not subdue the land of Canaan but by many years of conflict; and he never could reduce it wholly; the Philistines still remained, though checked and driven to their cities:

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the pious Israelite was thus excited to continue bold and wary, to preserve his confidence in God, and to perform his duty ; for his border was to be enlarged if he persevered in his obedience. It has been no less a task of labour, with the best among men, to overcome the world ; a task which can only terminate with life.

Let us then pursue that prudent course which wise and good men, through so many ages, have approved ; let us regard the true image of Religion amidst the varieties of this life : in her garments some things appear for gracefulness, for decency and beauty ; some for warfare and defence, some for glory and distinction, and some for penitence and mourning. The pious institutions of the Church are formed upon this chequered draught ; and we are sometimes summoned to rejoice, and sometimes we are enjoined to mourn : the great principles, however, of holiness and peace remain the same, though the several expressions of a pious temper
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are thus varied. These changeful characters, in the garb and services of religion, are well adapted to the nature and exigencies of our present state ; nor are they less consistent with our Lord's example, who, at divers times, sat at the board of plenty, kept himself retired, or wept.

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